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August 2007

Volume 20 Number 08

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inside™

F3

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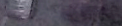
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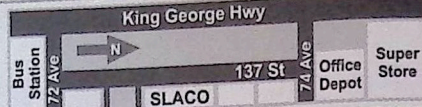


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17" LG L1752TX LCD 1400:1 DVI

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Sony Q170A 18xDVD±RW D.L.
6-Channel 5.1 Sound Card O/B
BenQ P010 PS/2 Keyboard
Logitech Optical Wheel mouse
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10/100/1000Mb Ethernet O/B
Speakers w/Headphone Jack
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10/100/1000Mb Ethernet O/B
Speakers w/Headphone Jack
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Sony Q170A 18xDVD±RW D.L.
6-Channel 5.1 Sound Card O/B
BenQ P010 PS/2 Keyboard
Logitech Optical Wheel mouse
17" P4-ATX USB2.0-Front Case
10/100/Mb Ethernet O/B
OG-1015 Speakers w/ Subwoofer
19" LG L194WTX Wide Screen LCD
(5ms, 2000:1, Dual Analog/Digital)

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Sony Q170A 18xDVD±RW D.L.
8-Channel 7.1 Sound Card O/B
Logitech Deluxe 250 desktop combo
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17" P4-ATX USB2.0-Front Case
Gigabit Ethernet & 1394 Firewire O/B
Altec Lansing VS3251 5.1 spk wireless
19" LG L194WTX Wide Screen LCD
(5ms, 2000:1, Dual Analog/Digital)

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MOTHERBOARD

ASUS P5SD2-X/P5VD2-MX-SE/P5B-Deluxe	79/75/198
ASUS P5B-VM-SE/P5B/P5B-E	119/91/134/64
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ASUS P5K-DL-WF/P5K3-DL-WF	236/92/269
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ASUS M2V-M2M/M2V	72/92/89/9
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EC5 945GT2-M945/A3(D)	78/99/9
Foxconn 760GX/K8M-C/R8M802-M2MA	69/79
Foxconn 865GT/MP45/P7AA-8K82	69/99/9
PC Partner 915P57-A47 915 chipset Firewire	89
Gigabyte GA965P-DS3/S3	144/115
Gigabyte GA965P-DS3R	159/9
Gigabyte GAM57SLI-4/GAM595SLI-SS	124/209
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MONITOR

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Acer 26" AL2616WBD/37" AL3720A	735/1249
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Daytek LCD Touch Screen 15"17"	599/769
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LG L1732TX Analog/Digital 4ms 1400:1	218
LG 19" L1900Q 3000:1 2ms LED backlight DVI	259/9
LG 1918S 1280x1024dpi 8ms	219/9
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Ever onward and more mobile

Sorry to have to be the one to remind you, but the summer isn't endless. In another month, we'll have to turn our attention away from barbecues and beach huts to more sobering thoughts of school, work or business.

Actually, it's not that bad, the fall season. After some R&R over the summer, I'm usually prepared to take on whatever tasks I have on hand with a renewed outlook. If I have the right technology, that is.

I've been a fan of portable computing forever, and this may be the year I need to replace my notebook yet again. Unfortunately, I bought my current machine three years ago during a technology trough - it's single core, and with a standard 4:3 screen aspect ratio. Had I been paying attention, I would have realized the computing world was heading to multiple core processors and widescreen.

The benefits of both became painfully clear the first time I powered up a dual core MacBook Pro loaner from Apple Canada. The 15-inch model was about the same weight as my single-core 14-inch T-series ThinkPad. However, the MacBook's widescreen really showed its advantages in programs like Photoshop or InDesign where the document workspace is flanked by menu panels, or in situations where you might want to see two documents side by side. And of course, multiple cores offer a smoother computing environment as well as faster work-through if the application is multiple processor aware.

As I write this in mid-July, Intel has just announced its Core2Extreme X7800 mobile processor, a 2.6 GHz dual

core processor that has been optimized for mobile applications (i.e., lots of technology to extend battery life) but uses the "Extreme" branding of the company's desktop processors. Intel says the processor is about 28 percent faster than its previous notebook processor.

AMD announced more details of its Griffin mobile processor architecture earlier this year, although Griffin-based products likely won't show up at retail until 2008. AMD is using 65 nm fabrication technology for the cores, and Griffin is what AMD calls a SOC or System on Chip design, where the northbridge, memory controller and HyperTransport 3 all reside on the same die with the two processor cores. AMD has engineered a lot of interesting technology into this architecture, all with the aim of squeezing every last drop of performance out of the notebook battery. In the next 18 months, we will likely see quad-core mobile processors from both companies.

With these developments, it is becoming evident that using a notebook doesn't mean sacrificing performance.

For even smaller mobile computing, Palm or Windows Mobile devices used to be the technology of choice, but these single-purpose PDAs are evolutionary dead-ends, thanks to ever more capable smartphones that offer processing power and applications equal to a PDA. Moreover, using very fast datacomm technologies, smartphones offer a connectivity footprint that Wi-Fi doesn't come close to matching.

In 2007, a smartphone plus notebook computer will cover virtually all of your computing needs - not just mobile computing needs, but computing needs, period. So you can do serious work at your desk or from that picnic table. Hmm, maybe summer is endless after all.

Enjoy the issue.

David Tanaka,

Editor-in-Chief

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At the Zoo

I have this great photo of a tiger, but I didn't have to go on a safari to get it — it was as close by as the local zoo. Many cities have large, well-managed zoos and aquariums, and if you happen to be vacationing somewhere that has such a facility, it's well worth putting on your must-photograph list.

Photographing animals at the zoo can sometimes be disappointing if the kept subjects are more shadows of their wild glory. I remember seeing polar bears in one zoo that were mangy and well past their prime. And many specimens do not do well in captivity, putting a hauntingly sad face to the term "caged beast." However, other animals can be lively and seem to thrive in their artificial environment.

Beyond the subjects themselves, photographing subjects at zoos and aquariums can hold other challenges. Often cages are made of glass or clear polycarbonate, and it's difficult to capture an animal without also getting glare and reflections. This is also a major problem with photographing marine life at an aquarium. Cages with bars or wire mesh are often worse because you can't find a better shooting angle as you might be able to do with a glass enclosure. The glass or mesh can also fool the autofocus system in a camera, so if you are not mindful of this, you might end up with

a memory card full of out of focus photos.

Lighting can also be a challenge. Indoor pavilions often use subdued lighting, and using a flash may not be viable, so you need to figure out a way to steady the camera for a long exposure — and also pray your subject does not move. With a tankful of fish, it's impossible to use a long exposure and not get blurred fish.

Many of the advances in digital camera technology can help you take better photos at the zoo or aquarium. High sensitivity (aka high ISO) settings allow you to use a faster shutter speed under low light conditions, and often this is the ticket for getting crisp shots of furry critters when in indoor pavilions. Mechanical anti-shake technology, either applied to the lens or the sensor components, can also reduce blurring caused by camera shake at low shutter speed. Anti-shake technology can also be helpful if you are some distance away from your subject and need to use an extreme telephoto setting — if you are far away from the dolphin show at an aquarium, for example. But if you happen to get ringside seats at the dolphin pool, another feature you might want is waterproofing. Some point and shoot cameras, notably models from Pentax and Olympus, will withstand

some splashing and even a dunking, but you can also purchase waterproof skins at a reasonable price for several popular camera models.

One feature I've used often at the zoo is an articulated view screen. One primate cage I visited had a small mesh barrier at eye level — impossible to get a decent photo through that — but perhaps two metres up, the screen changed to a wider mesh. I held the camera above my head and poked the lens through the bigger mesh. By having a view screen I could adjust down, I was able to compose the shot of the monkey.

Zoos offer limited vantage points, so it is often hard to take a photo without getting a distracting item such as part of a fence or some maintenance equipment into the shot. If you are faced with this, try to visualize how you could crop the photo once you get it into an image editor. By pre-visualizing, you can often create a more dynamic photo just by cropping out the parts that don't add value.

By David Tanaka



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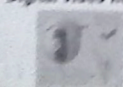
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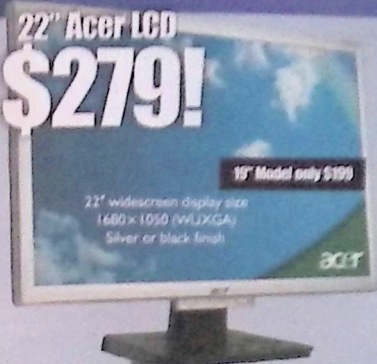


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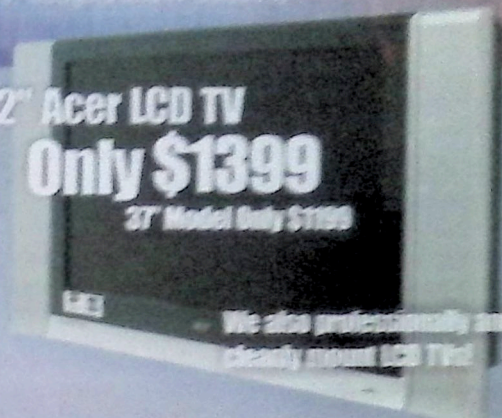


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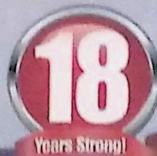
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Tech SOS for SOHO

One good thing about working in a large office is that when your computer crashes – often at the worst possible moment – you can call tech support for help. This is a luxury that many small and home offices don't have.

However, there are many places SoHo users can turn to when their technology fails them. Most large cities have many computer repair shops that will help customers root out viruses and replace failed hard drives. There are also 24-hour services that try to offer users not only technical support when their systems crash, but also help them set up their systems so they can avoid crashes.

Though many of the calls that Nerds on Site gets are from users having technical difficulties, the tech support company prefers to get involved before any technology is deployed, says its London, Ont.-based co-founder David Redekop.

The company has several services aimed at the SoHo market. It will help users not only repair their systems, but set up their networks, do regular maintenance work on systems and do security assessments to ensure systems and networks are protected from viruses and intruders.

When people call with a system failure, a client services representative will take down the reason for the call and their contact information. A nerd will then contact them within 20 minutes and provide them with an estimate of how much the service will cost and help resolve the problem over the phone, if possible. Onsite calls start at \$125 and are solution, rather than time, based.

Nerds on Site will also take a more proactive role for clients who are interested, advising them on how to set up their systems and performing regular system checks. Redekop, for example, recommends small and home offices get two Internet lines based on two different technologies, such as cable and DSL, and a business-grade router that can automatically failover to the second line. Consumer-class routers are not a good idea since they occasionally need to be reset. Nerds will also help consumers and small businesses set up old computers they've got lying around as backup computers that they can use to protect their data and also use in case their current computer crashes.

The company's managed services are tailored to individual businesses depending on their need and start at \$250 a month. Its nerd assurance plan is an all-inclusive package (though new projects aren't covered) in which Nerds maintains and repairs all systems.

Another 24 hour computer tech support service, Geek Squad, which is owned by Best Buy, also offers maintenance services as well as repair services. The Geek Squad will also help clients properly configure their systems and claims to be vendor agnostic. They will, for example, go to homes or small offices and set up wireless networks. The rates are based on the services provided, which is determined by the kind of system the client has. The average price point for a network installation is about \$140.

The maintenance program could save users a lot of headaches, says Geek Squad special agent 909, Fritz Schu, who is based out of Woodbridge, Ont. "Sure, it will cost \$149 or something for a tune up, but it can prevent that call at midnight when disaster hits."

There are several things consumers and small business owners can do on their own to ensure the health of their computers. "Heat is the biggest killer of computers," Schu says. An overly noisy fan could mean that the bearings are going. They are made out of metal, so a clicking of metal could be a signal that they're about to go. Fans aren't expensive and should be replaced if they start showing signs of demise.

He also recommends users run regular diagnostics on their computers to ensure the health of their hard drives using software that reads and writes on it in order to test it. In order to avoid emergencies, Geek Squad recommends users replace old hard drives and use them for backup purposes.

Schu also strongly recommends antivirus software. "If you don't have antivirus or antispyware software, the operating costs will go up for your computer."

A reverse firewall, which controls outbound traffic, can also prevent future headaches, says Redekop. Though most routers offer some kind of protection, reverse firewalls can be set up with simple rules that can prevent spammers from using computers to bombard others.

Keeping Windows Update up-to-date can also help users protect their systems from future crashes or virus infiltration, Redekop says.

Finally, users should refrain from running their computer in administrator mode. This makes it more difficult for viruses and spyware to get hold of a computer, he says.

There are also a number of manuals users can rely on, such as the For Dummies series, The Missing Manual series and the Visual QuickStart Series. Most software programs also come with CD or online manuals.

By Poonam Khanna

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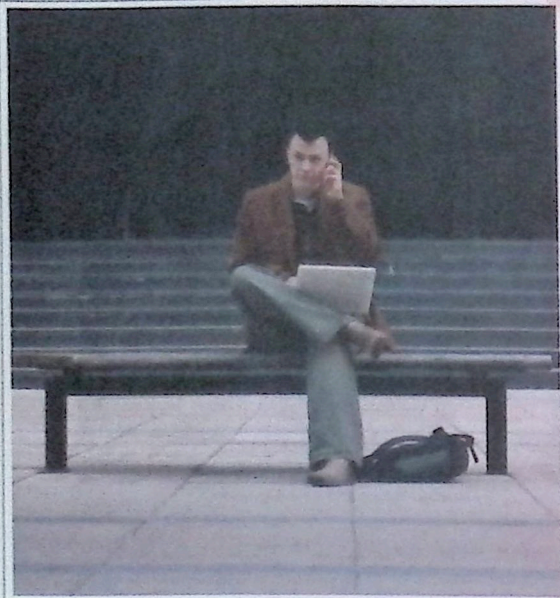
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Keep it up to date



On my desk are a desktop computer, a notebook computer and a smart phone. I'm not alone in the technology I use and I'm not alone in finding it difficult to get the pieces to talk to each other. Ok, so it's relatively simple to get the computers connected using a broadband router, but getting Outlook configured so you can see all your email on any computer is an entirely different situation. Although it's 2007, some days it might just as well be 1987 for all the communicating some programs and devices do.

The problem of syncing data between a computer and a cell phone or between applications on two computers is not a recent one. Many early camera phones lacked tools for downloading photos from the phone to your computer. Often all you could do was to use the phone's email tools to email the photos to yourself, but if your phone couldn't send email, you were in trouble. It's also always been difficult to share some types of data such as email messages and accounting records between two computers. Unless the program is both capable and configured correctly, it simply won't be able to successfully update your data if you make a change to some of your data on one computer and some of the data on the other computer.

Whether you can sync computer data with your smart phone depends on whether the two can talk to each other. Start by checking to see if your smartphone is compatible with your desktop software. Devices running Windows Mobile are most likely to be able to share Outlook data — other operating systems may offer differing degrees of compatibility.

If the device can share Outlook data, you'll need a way to connect your

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computer and your handheld. You may be able to synch the two using an infrared connection, Bluetooth or a USB cable which may or may not come with the phone. You will also need software to perform the task of synching the data – this might be included with the phone or you may need to purchase a separate program such as Mobile Phone Tools from BVRP Software, which is compatible with a range of Motorola phones (www.bvrp.com/customers/motorola/v3/buy/eng/selector.htm).

To synch your phone with your computer, install the synch software and any hardware required, such as a Bluetooth connector, and connect the two. Launch the software on your computer and use the program options to configure what is synched. If you're using Microsoft ActiveSync, choose Tools > Options and check the data to synch and then configure the settings to determine how much data is synched – remembering that your handheld has less available storage than your desktop.

Once you have configured what to synch, click to start the synchronization process. You can also copy files to or from your computer to your handheld – so you can, for example, load files onto your handheld or download photos and videos.

Synching data is a two-way process where data is updated on both devices; because of this, you might find some items marked as being in conflict – this might occur when, for example, you make different changes to one

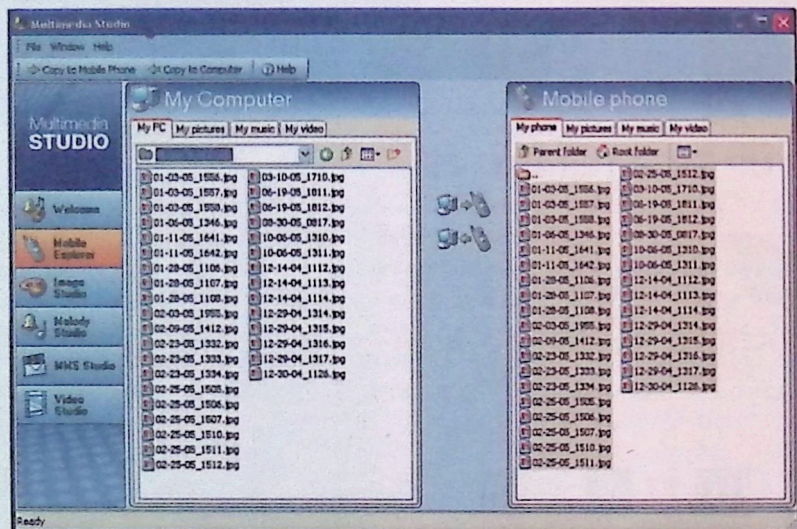
piece of contact data and do this on both devices. You might be able to specify what happens if a conflict is encountered and the more regularly you synchronize your data, the less likelihood there will be of you encountering a situation where the same item has been altered in different ways on both devices.

Outlook isn't easy to synch between two computers because it stores data in a single .PST file and because there is no built-in synch tool to use to maintain it. One unusual but generally successful way to keep Outlook synched on two computers is to use your smart phone or PDA as an intermediary. Synch Outlook from one computer with your smart phone and then synch the smartphone with the second computer.

You can also make use of the online tools in Outlook to keep calendars up to date by publishing your calendar online or by emailing it to yourself. If you publish your calendar to a website, you can access it whenever you have access to the Internet. If you email it to yourself, you can open the calendar in Outlook 2007 on the second computer and display it either side-by-side with your existing calendar or in overlay mode so you can see both at once.

As you can see, keeping everything in synch as you move from home to work and as you travel with a laptop isn't simple, but with some planning, it can be done.

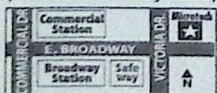
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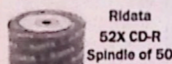
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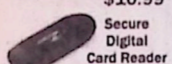
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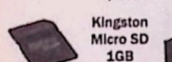
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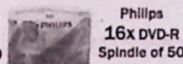
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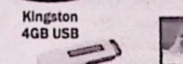
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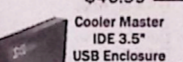
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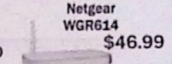
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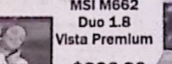
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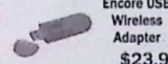
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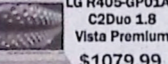
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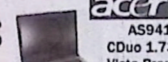
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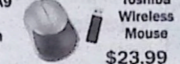
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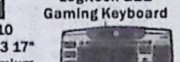
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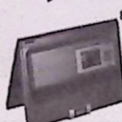
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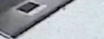
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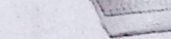
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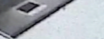
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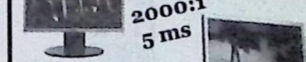


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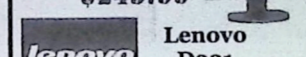
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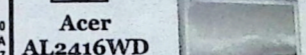
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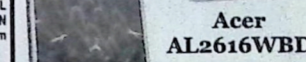
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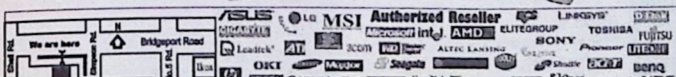
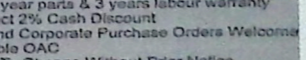
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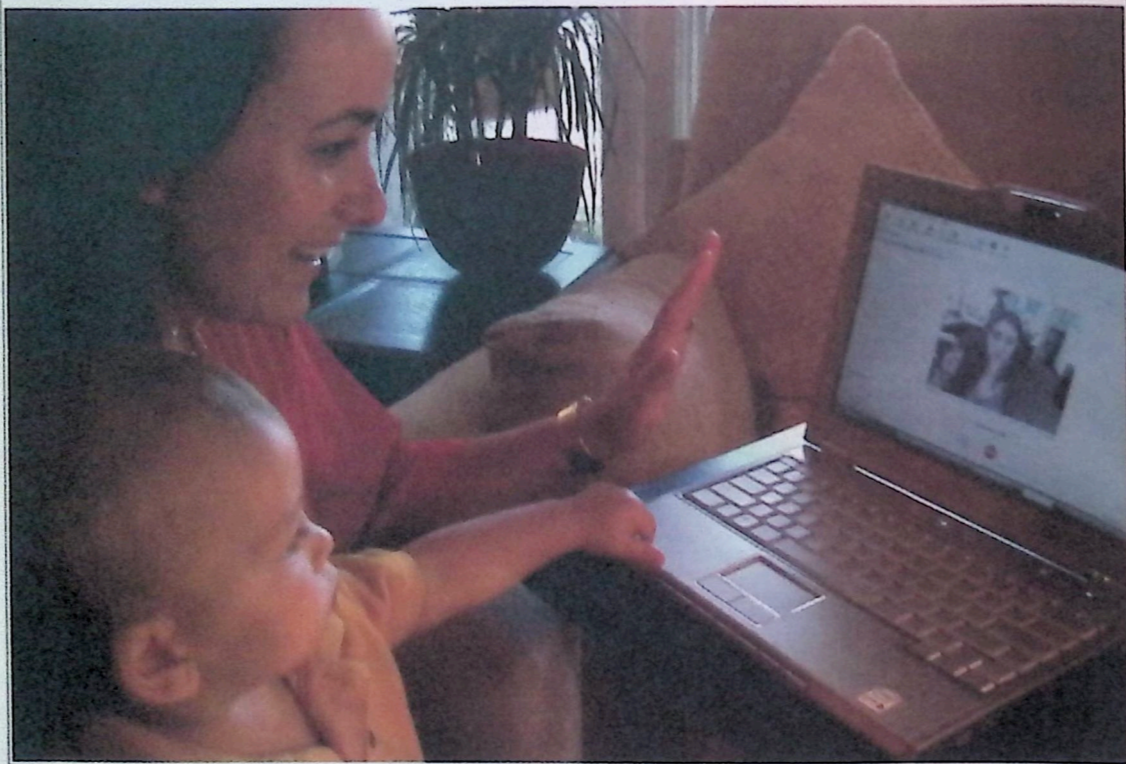
It is precisely 11,413 kilometres between Toronto and Shanghai, and yours truly felt every centimetre on my recent business trip to China.

Don't get me wrong, travel is an essential part of a freelance journalist's life, but six days away from my wife and three young kids - on a foreign continent, no less - isn't exactly fun for a work-at-home dad who would rather type while watching kids play in the backyard than write articles in a hotel room.

That said, a trip like this is considerably more palatable in 2007 than even, say, five years ago - thanks to a little piece of free technology.

I'm referring to Skype (www.skype.com), a popular online communication tool that lets you type, talk or - if you own an inexpensive webcam - even engage in video chats with family and friends anywhere in the world if they've got a PC and broadband Internet connection.

Because I installed Skype and a webcam on both my home PC and laptop, this software saved my sanity (and marriage) on this recent trip. Let me tell you - seeing your kids wave, blow kisses and hold up artwork made in kindergarten class can seriously bridge the distance and reduce homesickness experienced by frequent travellers.



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Skype, which is available in 28 languages, isn't just for globetrotters, however, as this VoIP (voice over Internet protocol) technology is also ideal for those who simply want to eliminate long distance charges by talking with others in the world.

SkypeOut

As with instant messaging programs such as Windows Live Messenger and Yahoo! Messenger, Skype users can also send and receive files to and from one another while chatting, engage in conference-call chats and personalize the program's look and sound (including ring tones).

But Skype differs from these other programs in two key respects.

For one, you can use Skype not just for PC-to-PC calls but PC-to-phone calls too, often referred to as SkypeOut. Therefore, computer users can call any cellphone or land line in the world for 2.4 cents a minute and up (prices are listed at www.skype.com/products/skypeout).

In December 2006, the company unveiled Skype Unlimited, which lets Canadians call any phone in Canada or the U.S. for a flat \$35 a year, with no connection fees, per-minute charges or hidden costs.

SkypeOut is growing in popularity: In the first quarter of this year alone, there were 7.7 billion minutes of PC-to-PC calls, said Don Albert, general manager of Skype North America, and 1.5 billion SkypeOut minutes, which is up 123 percent since 2004.

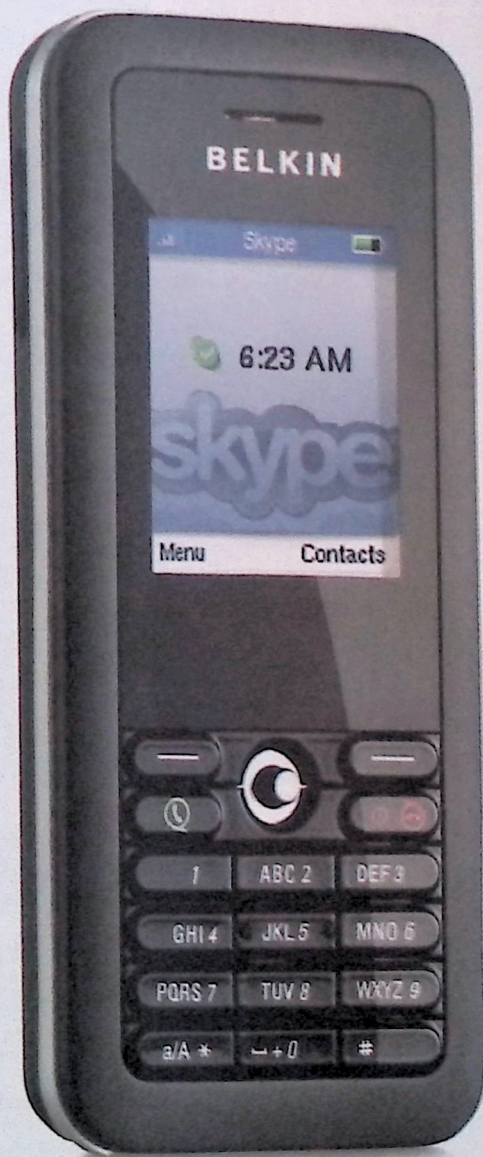
"Without question, SkypeOut represents a significant savings over other telecommunication options, such as long distance and international calling, so our customers see the value in that," Albert said.

But Skypeln, which allows users to call a Skype account from a land line or

cellphone, is not yet available in Canada, Albert confirmed, because of emergency 911 services issues. (The CRTC requires that VoIP providers offer E911, or enhanced 911 services, to its customers, which Skype does not provide in Canada.)

Hardware partners, too

Another differentiator is the fact that Skype has partnered with nearly 200 hardware companies to create such Skype-certified products as cordless phones, webcams and mobile handsets that work with the service. For example, the Philips VoIP841 cordless phone (available



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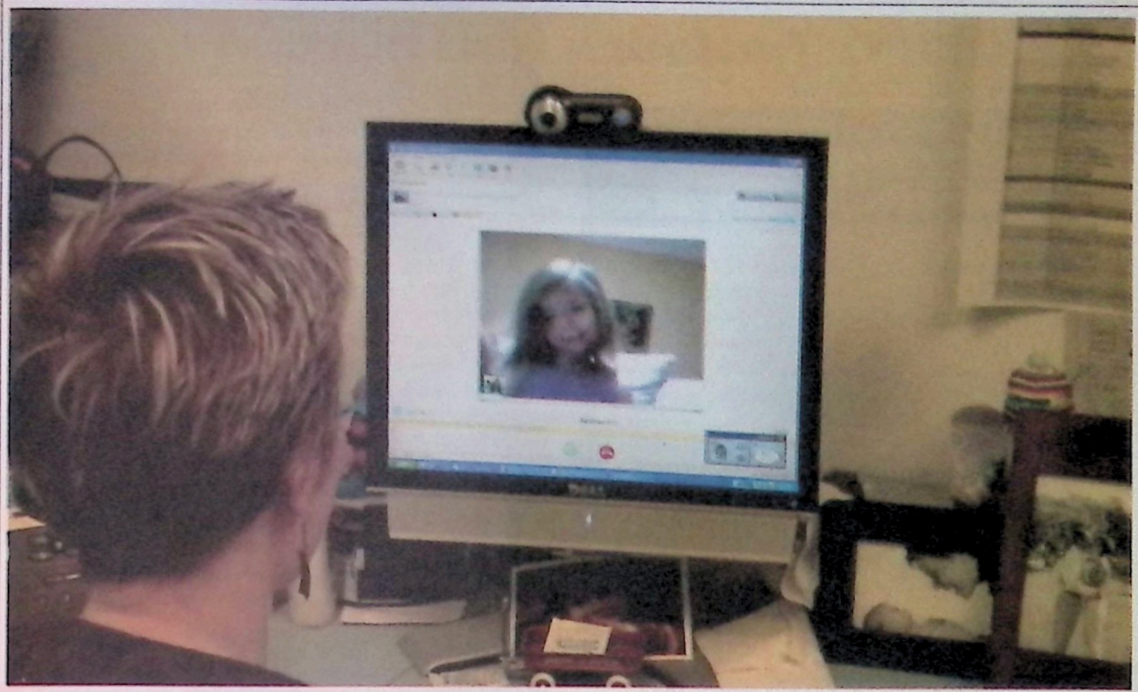
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later this year for \$199.99; www.philips.ca) will let you roam around your home on a cordless device with keypad to make or accept Skype calls. In fact, this phone doubles as a landline too, so one plug on the base goes into the wall's telephone jack while the other plugs into a modem or router (no PC necessary).

Some phones work anywhere there's a Wi-Fi hotspot, like in a café, hotel or airport lounge, and more than 150 Windows Mobile-based smartphones on the market can support a mobile version of Skype for free calls over the Internet.

"We're leveraging the power of our hardware and software partnerships to create a much richer experience than plain old phone calls," Albert said. "We're trying to do a lot more than just transport voice phone calls to the Net - instead, we've added video calling, the ability to express yourself with ring tones and avatars, links to favourite websites, photos of yourself, sending files, multi-chats and user-generated global business directories."

When asked where Skype will be five years from now, Albert said Skype users will want to take it with them wherever they go. "We want to free Skype from its roots as a PC application and bring it to (more) mobile devices."

Certainly, city-wide Wi-Fi, also referred to as WiMAX, might help make this projection a reality. "Skype will allow more portability and richer functionality," he said. "Five to 10 years from now, I don't think consumers or businesses will be content with just voice calls."

In the fall of 2005, eBay purchased Skype for US\$2.6 billion. Skype now has more than 200 million users worldwide.

By Marc Saltzman



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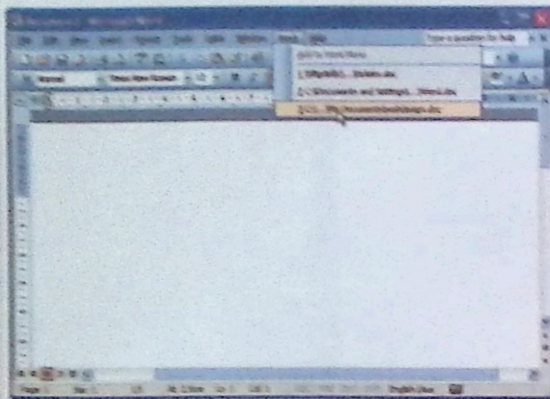
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DIY: Toolbars and buttons



Add documents that you use regularly to Word's Work menu so they're always handy and accessible.

Put the Office tools you need where they are easy to find by customizing your toolbars. In all versions of Office (including 2003, but not including 2007), you have an almost unlimited ability to customize the built-in toolbars and menus.

To customize any toolbar in Word, Excel or PowerPoint, for example, right click the toolbar and choose Customize from the menu. When the Customize dialog appears, choose the Commands tab. Now locate and drag any item from the Commands list onto the toolbar.

Word includes some additional built-in menus you can use. From the Customize dialog, click the Built-in Menus option in the Categories list and locate the Work menu. Drag it onto either your menu bar or onto a toolbar. When it is in place, close the Customize dialog and click the Work menu to open it. The Work menu gives you quick access to files that you need to be readily accessible. To add a document to the Work menu, first open the document and then click the Add to Work Menu option in the Work menu. Now, whenever you open Word, that document will be available on the Work menu – just click to open it. This gets around the limitation of the File menu in that it can only contain links to the nine most recently opened files.

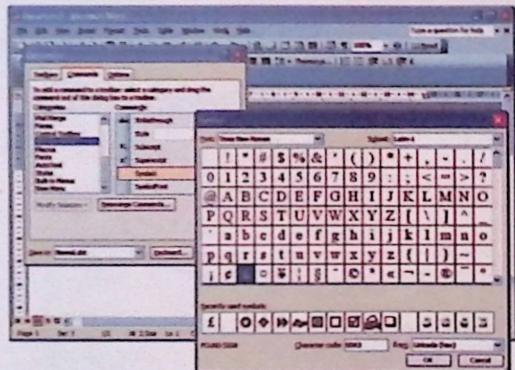
To remove a document from the Work menu, hold the Ctrl and Alt keys and

press the hyphen key next to the O key on your keyboard. The mouse pointer changes to a thick black bar that removes menu and toolbar items when you click on them with it. To remove a file from the Work menu, click on it to open it and click on the file to remove it from the menu. Take care when using this feature to ensure you don't delete something you really want to keep.

You can move items around the toolbars in any Office program by holding the Alt key and drag a button from one toolbar to another or from one position to another. You can also drag a button off a toolbar while holding the Alt key and drop it into the main editing area to delete it from a toolbar.

If you make a mistake when customizing one of Word's built in toolbars, revert the toolbar to its original state by right clicking it, choose Customize and click the Toolbars tab. Locate the toolbar in the list, click its checkbox and click Reset to reset it to its original shipped state.

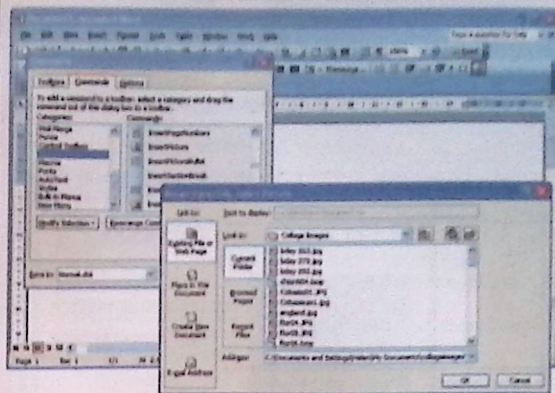
You can add your own macros to a toolbar so that they are available by simply clicking a toolbar button. For example, in Word, from the Customize dialog click the Commands tab and click Macros in the Categories list to view the macros that are available. Click the macro to add to a toolbar and drag and drop it from the Commands tab onto the toolbar. With the customize dialog still open, right click the button and give the macro button a new name or click the Default style option and then either the Change Button



Using the Symbol command, you can create custom buttons to insert frequently used symbols.

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The InsertPicture toolbar button can be used to automatically insert a picture into a document whenever you click it.

Image or the Edit Button Image options to create a button image to use.

There are options in Word that you can use to add additional functionality to your toolbar. One of these is the symbol command, which lets you insert a symbol into a document with a single click. This is handy for adding accented characters or symbols that you cannot otherwise easily enter using the keyboard.

To create a symbol button, click the All Commands option in the Commands list and locate and click the Symbol entry. Drag and drop it onto a toolbar and, when the symbol dialog appears, click the symbol to attach to the button and click Ok. The toolbar will now display the font name and the symbol number. You can edit this by right clicking the button and typing a different name for it. If the symbol can be typed using the keyboard, pressing the Alt key and a series of numbers you can add the symbol itself to its toolbar button, or click the Edit Button Image button and draw the symbol to create your own icon.

In a similar way, you can add the InsertPicture command to a toolbar from the All Commands list. With the Customize dialog still open, right click the new button, choose Assign hyperlink, Insert Picture and select a picture to open whenever this button is clicked.

There are plenty of options for customizing your Office toolbars to put the commands you use every day right where you can easily find them.

By Helen Bradley



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Online productivity suites

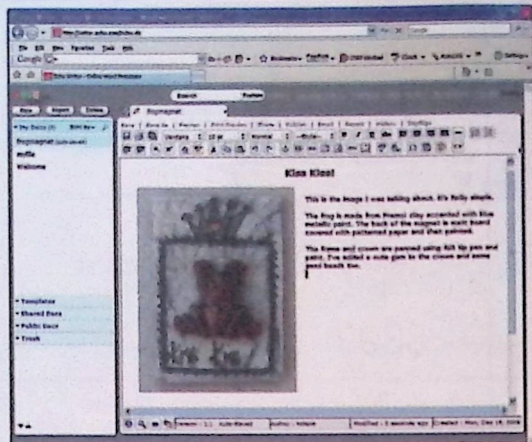
The last few years has seen the proliferation of applications that are hosted online. While these started out as small programs such as games and utilities, this is no longer the case. There are many substantial programs available online, including a number of office suites.

There are many benefits to using an online office suite. It's automatically updated, so you're always using the latest version. In most cases, the application is run from inside your browser so you don't need any special installation routines and there are fewer compatibility issues than you might experience in an installed version. You also have access to the program wherever you happen to be, so if you don't have your computer with you, you can still access the application from, for example, an Internet café.

There are a number of online office applications and the most well known is probably Google's free Google Docs & Spreadsheets (<http://docs.google.com>). These are, as their names suggest, a word processor and spreadsheet program. The word processor is the old Writely application rebadged under the Google banner. To access the program, you will need to have a Google account. When you log in, you will find a no frills interface that does a credible job of allowing you to create documents and spreadsheets online. You can save your word processed documents in one of a number of formats, including OpenOffice.org, PDF and Word, and you can save them online or on your computer. You can also import documents and email them from the application. The spreadsheet tool is rudimentary and does not as yet have a charting option.

Google also has a new fee-based application called Google Apps (www.google.com/a), which incorporates a number of Google tools including Gmail, Google Talk and Calendar, a Start Page, Docs & Spreadsheets, a web page creator and a swag of service tools including help and phone support. This application is targeted towards specialist groups such as schools, families, small businesses and enterprises to provide a higher level of service than the free application.

Included in the small business tools, for example, is the ability to have email addresses linked to a domain name and up to 10 GB of storage per account. With online hosting for the applications provided by Google, all a business needs is computers, an Internet connection and a browser and



much of the productivity software that is needed on a daily basis could be sourced online.

One of the original companies involved in online applications is ThinkFree (www.thinkfree.com). This online office suite comes with 1GB of online storage on the ThinkFree servers. It includes a word processor, spreadsheet and presentation software and has the same interface as its desktop version, making it a viable online alternative for users of ThinkFree Desktop. There are thousands of documents accessible online that are already created and that you can open and use as a starting point for your own. It can save its files in the same document formats as Microsoft Office uses.

Another of the current group of online suites is FlySuite (www.flysuite.com), a fee-based application comprising a word processor and spreadsheet program. You can buy one or both applications according to your needs. The service includes up to 1GB of storage for your files on the FlySuite server. A presentations application, FlySlide, is due for release soon. However, with so many good, free applications around, it's hard to find a good reason to justify shelling out cash for Flysuite.

Zoho (www.zoho.com) is another one of the online suites and, unlike the others, it has a lot of applications in its bundle. It includes a writer, spreadsheet, presentation and planner application, as well as project management and chat software, and there are new applications added all the time.

Zoho's planning application is similar to Backpack, providing you with an online space for organizing your life and work. The spreadsheet tool at Zoho called ZohoSheet can create charts (something that neither Google nor ThinkFree are able to do), which adds to its attraction.

As you can see, if you're looking for an online suite, there are plenty to choose from and most are free. The question you're most likely to ask is just how good are they? While none of these programs pack the sheer weight or punch of a Microsoft Office, it's worth considering that most users don't use a fraction of the features in the larger suites anyway. Most do suffer some lack of speed and a limited feature set, and for this reason, probably won't replace your desktop applications this year. However, this genre of software is getting better every day and it's definitely here to stay.

By Helen Bradley

	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct
Cashflow Budget				
Income				
Bank balance	6,350	6,350	6,350	6,350
Product 1	150,220	168,000	150,220	168,000
Product 2	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500
Product 3	9,500	9,500	9,500	9,500
	168,070	180,350	168,070	180,350
Expenses				
Rent	15,036	15,036	15,036	15,036
Minor vehicle	20,400	20,400	20,400	20,400
Taxes	3,300	3,300	3,300	3,300
Office - General	20,500	20,500	20,500	20,500
Entertainment	15,000	15,000	15,000	15,000
Accounting	6,500	6,500	6,500	6,500
Sundry	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000
Total Expenses	85,736	85,736	85,736	85,736
Surplus/deficit	82,334	94,614	82,334	94,614
Bank	150,354	175,364	150,354	175,364
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Using Bluetooth

Bluetooth is one of those technologies that actually does help simplify your life and save you time. For example, rather than spending hours entering names and numbers into the address book on your new cell phone with a minuscule keypad, you can use Bluetooth to wirelessly transfer your contacts directly from the address book on your PC.

You can also use Bluetooth to get around poor cell phone reception. If your home office is located in your basement, for example, pair up your Bluetooth-enabled cell phone with a Bluetooth headset. Leave your cell phone on the main floor, where the reception is strong, and then use the headset to make and receive calls while you are downstairs. (Glenn Kennedy, carrier sales manager at Motorola Canada, says a friend of his uses this strategy.)

Talk on your cell phone while driving with both hands on the wheel using a Bluetooth speakerphone kit for your car. BlueAnt's SuperTooth Light (US\$399) is an easy-to-use handsfree kit that you can pair with up to five Bluetooth-enabled phones with Headset (HSP) or Hands-Free (HFP) profiles. Talk time is up to 15 hours; on standby, the device will last up to 800 hours. Calls will sound crystal clear from your end, although recipients might complain that they can hear too much—including your AC and surrounding traffic.

Print photos from your Bluetooth-enabled cell phone, PDA or point-and-shoot camera by transferring them wirelessly to your printer via Motorola's PC350 Bluetooth USB PC Adapter (\$69.95). Transfer speed will fluctuate, but a 1 MB file will take roughly 30 seconds to reach the printer.

Walk comfortably down the street with wireless headphones that rest discreetly at the base of your neck. Motorola's SB MOTOROLA Headset (\$149.95) contains controls in the right and left speakers and will play music stored in your Bluetooth-enabled cell phone. If you prefer your iPod playlist, a kit (\$129.95) is also available that includes the SB and a Bluetooth iPod adapter. (You can also use this iPod adapter to connect your iPod to any other Bluetooth-enabled product.)

Audiophiles who don't mind the extra bulge can opt for Motorola's SB05 Bluetooth Stereo Headset (\$159.95). The headset includes a mic and comes with a cable that you can plug into your MP3 player for those situations where Bluetooth isn't suitable, such as on a flight.

Skype calling is more comfortable with a wireless headset, such as Genium's nIDEAL VoIP Headset (US\$159.95), which will keep you connected as long as you remain within 30 feet of your Bluetooth-enabled PC. The device supports Windows 2000/XP.

Chances are you own at least one Bluetooth-enabled product. But are you taking advantage of what this technology has to offer?

1. Bluetooth operates on an unlicensed band (2.4 GHz ISM), so there is no cost to use it. The only price you pay is for purchasing the Bluetooth-enabled product.
2. You don't need to install driver software to use Bluetooth. Pairing one Bluetooth device to another is a simple process you perform in a few steps.
3. In order for Bluetooth to operate, the devices need to be within a certain physical range of each other. There are three ranges for Bluetooth: Class 1 (up to 300 feet), Class 2 (up to 30 feet) and Class 3 (up to three feet). Most devices (including mobile phones) fall in the Class 2 range of 30 feet.
4. The speed at which data transfers from one Bluetooth device to another also varies, depending on the version of Bluetooth your device uses. (For example, when transferring a photo from your cell phone to a printer.) If your device uses Bluetooth Version 1.2, the speed is 1 Megabit per second (Mbps); Version 2.0 transfers at up to 3 Mbps.
5. Bluetooth is a universal and global technology standard; a Bluetooth-enabled product from Canada will work with a Bluetooth-enabled product, from, say, Japan. To be certified as Bluetooth compliant, devices from one manufacturer must play well with Bluetooth devices from any other manufacturer.
6. A Bluetooth-enabled device can pair with - and simultaneously operate with - up to seven devices at a time.
7. Bluetooth technology handles voice and data transmissions simultaneously, so while talking on your cell phone you can also listen to music stored in your phone by streaming it wirelessly to another device.
8. Bluetooth-enabled devices communicate with each other using particular Bluetooth profiles. Advanced Audio Distribution Profile (A2DP) is one such profile designed to transfer a stereo (two-channel) audio stream, like music from an MP3 player, to be decoded and played back by a headset or car radio (Wikipedia). For high quality audio, both must support A2DP which is not a given, especially in older Bluetooth devices. Interestingly, although Mac OS X has supported Bluetooth since 2002, Mac OS X 10.4 does not currently support A2DP. Windows XP and Vista will support A2DP, but you must install third party drivers.

By Jennifer Kavour



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The bizhub C550

Konica Minolta's high-end multifunction office printer

Konica Minolta debuted its new printer/copier/scanner/fax machine, the bizhub C550, at Toronto's Steelback Grand Prix racing event this summer. This is the first in a series of bizhub products scheduled for release this year, which Konica Minolta hopes will help mark the company as Canada's top business solution provider.

The C550 is designed to perform in the centre of your office. The power and network cables are discreetly hidden from sight. Visual cues, such as blinking lights, allow you to determine the printing status from across a room. Other physical markers also simplify the operation of the machine, which is housed in recycled materials that provide a grey colour scheme.

The unit comes with a tilting colour display, which complies with Section

508 wheelchair compatibility and large solid glass from overhead lighting. You can preview full colour thumbnails on the screen or zoom in to read text documents before printing. Files can be stored directly on a USB hard drive.

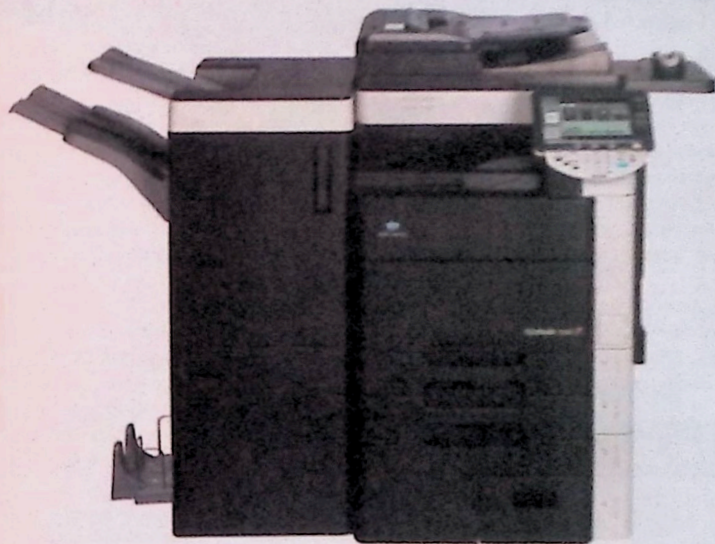
Operation is quiet, but robust. The C550 outputs 45 ppm colour and 95 ppm black and white, on paper weights up to 300 lb. cover stock. It will input pages up to 15x17 inches in size, output up to 12x18 inch sheets and also print banners up to 48 inches long. Finishing options include multi-position stapling, saddle-stitched booklets, 2/3-hole punching and refolding. (The stapling finisher is an additional \$3000.) There are four paper trays and if you add the optional 3000-sheet large capacity cassette (\$2000), the paper capacity totals 6650 sheets.

As a scanner, the C550 supports TWAIN and Scan-to-HDL and will also scan directly to email, FTP or your desktop with speeds up to 25 ppm.

Several security features are included, but the most interesting is the optional Biometric Authentication (\$1500). The authenticator is slightly smaller than a mouse, with a small curved bed for you to rest your finger on. Using three measurements of finger vein patterns, the machine automatically recognizes who you are, records your activity, and enforces any restrictions associated with your user account.

Konica Minolta is placing a lot of emphasis on customer service and support, important aspects to consider when purchasing an MFP in this price range. (The C550 is priced at \$33,000.) Luc Filion, VP of sales at Konica Minolta Business Solutions Canada's Eastern Region, says the company is focused on customer cost savings and will try to reduce your operating costs through strategies like print on demand, device consolidation and print migration.

By Jennifer Kavour



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Excel Worksheet Menu

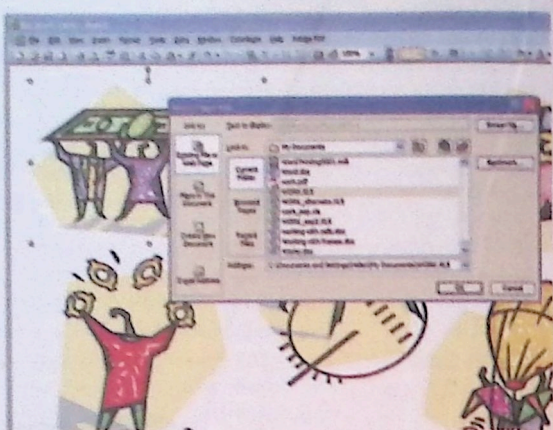
Do you spend valuable time hunting for worksheets that you use fairly regularly, but not often enough that they appear on the Excel file menu? If you do, then you can save yourself a lot of the time by creating a simple worksheet menu. The menu puts all the files that you use every day into the Excel window so that they are easily accessible.

To create your workbook menu, open a new Excel file and remove the screen elements that you don't need. To do this, choose Tools, Options, View tab and deselect the Gridlines, Rows and Column Headers, Horizontal Scrollbar, Vertical Scrollbar and Sheet Tab checkboxes. When you click OK, you should have a very plain screen with no tools for resizing the worksheet. Maximize the worksheet by clicking the Maximize button in its top right corner so that it fills the Excel work area.

At this stage, you may want to make the worksheet look more attractive, and to do this, you can add a background to it. Choose Format, Sheet, Background and choose an image from your disk to use as the image behind the worksheet. If it is too small, it will be tiled to fit. The other option is to select all the visible cells and use the Fill Color button to fill the worksheet with a solid colour.

You can use images or text or both to launch the worksheets. To use images, locate a series of images that you want to use to launch your worksheets. These can be any images you like and can be indicative of the purpose of the worksheet or not. Insert the images into the worksheet and size them to suit. To compress the images so that they take less file space, right click one, choose Format Picture and then the Picture tab and the Compress button. To compress the images, select All pictures in document, Web/Screen, enable the Compress Pictures and Delete Cropped Areas of Pictures checkbox and click OK and then OK again.

To create the hyperlinks that do the work of opening the worksheets you need to work on, right click an image and choose Insert, Hyperlink and then choose Existing file or Web Page option. Click the Browse for File button and locate the file to open when this particular image is clicked. Typically, this



would be an Excel worksheet but it could also be a Word document or a PowerPoint presentation if you often need to access this file when you are working from inside Excel. Locate the file and click OK.

Click the Screen Tip button and add a screen tip that will appear when the mouse cursor hovers the image – this is particularly important if your images don't relate to the content of the file you are linking to – you'll need this text to identify the file you are about to open. Click OK and then click outside the image to deselect it. Repeat this process to add hyperlinks to all the images on the worksheet to link them to the files that you want to have access to. You can also create text links by typing some text in a cell, click the cell and then add a hyperlink as you did before.

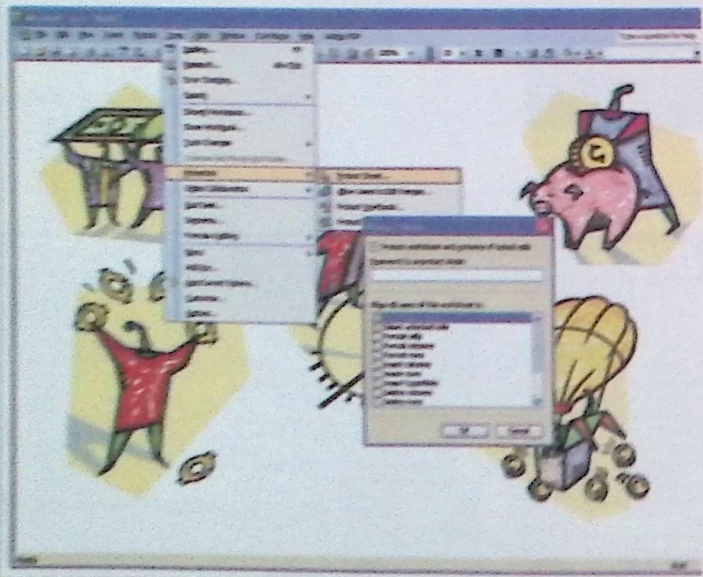
For safety, it's best to protect the sheet so it can't be altered by accident. To do this, choose Tools, Protection, Protect Sheet and click OK. You won't necessarily need a password, you just need some protection to ensure that an image, for example, can't be deleted by accident.

To make this worksheet appear whenever you open Excel, you should place the worksheet in your XLStart folder. Any file stored in this folder will be opened automatically whenever Excel is launched. This will ensure the worksheet menu will be ready to use whenever you start Excel. Your XLStart folder is typically located in your C:\Documents and Settings\username\Application Data\Microsoft\Excel folder or your C:\Program Files\Microsoft Office\Office11 folder. If you can't find it here, search for it using Windows Search.

Once you have saved the menu file, close it, close Excel and open Excel again. When the new worksheet appears on the screen, you can test each hyperlinked image and cell to make sure it opens the file that you expect it to open. The Web toolbar lets you navigate from one file to the next; for example, you can use the Back button on the toolbar to return to the worksheet menu.

If you need to make changes to the menu in the future, unprotect the worksheet, make the changes, re-protect it and save it.

By Helen Bradley





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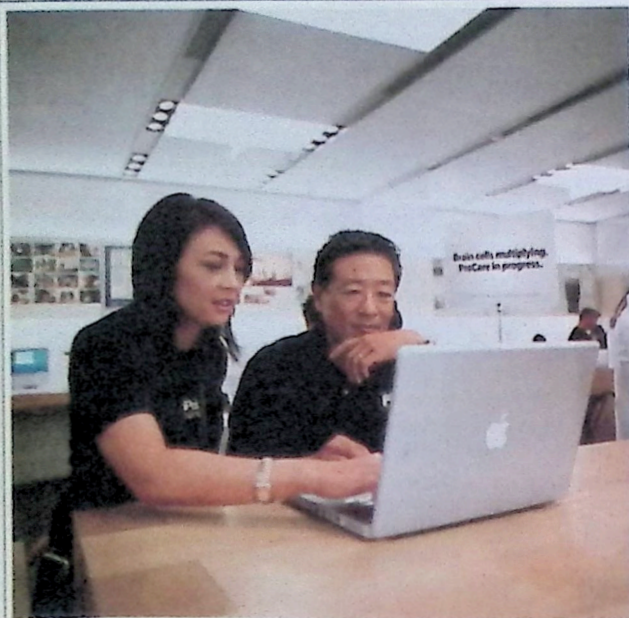
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An appointment at The Apple Store



Apple's computer sales are on the rise. The company shipped over 1.5 million Macintosh computers during the fiscal 2007 second quarter, which marks a 36 percent increase from the same quarter last year. "The Mac is clearly gaining market share...more than three times the industry growth rate," says Steve Jobs in a recent press release.

Whether it's due to the Get a Mac campaign, the rise of the iPod, the increasing number of retail stores in shopping malls, or all those movie cameos – the Mac is drifting away from its cult status as an elite system for the non-conformist individual to a machine with mass market appeal. Yet Apple retains its unique identity in the computer manufacturer market by

continuing to offer something different to its customers.

In addition to the user-friendly interface so intuitive you can often problem-solve on your own, loads of free software you actually prefer to use, and a secure environment that's nearly virus-free, Apple accepts appointments at The Apple Store. You can ask questions, receive technical support, or just brainstorm ideas with a real, live person without even having to wait in line.

Many of the services are suited for computer novices and newcomers to Apple, although there are still benefits to be found for the seasoned Mac user and a new program focuses exclusively on providing creative support.

ProCare

Apple's OS X operating system is known for its security and reliability. In fact, the most common complaint I've heard from people who've signed up for an extended Apple warranty is that they never had to use it. ProCare is a little different in that it provides access to six services and supports up to three computers (registered in your name). The cost is \$99 for one year.

One of these services is a white-glove treatment specially suited for those switching from a PC. Apple will transfer all the files from your old machine [PC or Mac] into your new one, so you don't lose any of your saved data. This includes photos, music and movies – and also your mail, calendar and address book.

Also included is an annual tune-up. Bring your Mac into the Apple Store and they will run system diagnostics, update your Apple software and clean your monitor and keyboard. (Keyboards are notorious for harbouring bacteria though, so you should really be cleaning it more often than this.)

Anyone who's ever had to rely on traditional forms of technical support – online, email, or telephone – knows what a nightmare the process can be. With ProCare, you get some new options. Rapid Repairs provides same-day, in-store service on your machine. Or, if you don't feel like waiting in line for the next available technician, you can just drop off your computer

at the store for a QuickDrop repair. You can also pre-book a one-on-one appointment with a Mac Genius (up to 14 days in advance) for guaranteed quality time between you, your machine, and a technician. (My mother recently purchased her first Mac and bought a ProCare membership. Her one-on-one appointments at the Genius Bar in Nashville, TN have been an invaluable source of education.)

One to One

If you don't require the technical know-how, but are lacking in the creative department, One to One is another \$99 annual membership option that allows you to book an unlimited number of one-on-one training sessions with Creatives (as opposed to ProCare's Mac Geniuses). This



onetoone

new program from Apple teaches you how to get the most out of the applications that came with your machine and start producing creative projects of your own.

"Our Creatives have extensive experience in their field and a passion for teaching," says Simon Atkins of Apple Canada. "Members can choose to focus these sessions on anything from learning more about getting started with a Mac or iPod, to advancing their moviemaking, digital photography and podcasting skills, building a website or presentation, or can even use the sessions to get answers to their specific questions or help with a creative project."

The sessions are personally tailored to your level of expertise, and booked up to 14 days in advance. Eleven areas are covered, including a Present and Publish session for business-minded individuals who need help creating dynamic presentations and printing projects. There's a Music Making session for learning how to create, layer and edit original song recordings. If you have a specific project you want to tackle and just want to brainstorm with someone, you can book a session for an Open Project.

Personal Shopper

Buying a Mac seems like a relatively simple process. You have three desktops (iMac, Mac Pro and Mac mini) and two laptops (MacBook and MacBook Pro) to choose from, with key differences in screen size, storage space, graphics, memory and processor speed. But with pricing ranging anywhere from \$679 (Mac mini) to \$3099 (17-inch MacBook Pro), getting a second opinion is not a bad idea.

You can avoid long line-ups and frazzled employees by booking your own Personal Shopping Reservation (again, up to 14 days in advance) via Apple's website. This will give you one hour of dedicated, one-on-one service at a select Apple Store. You'll get answers to all your questions, and also be able to see and test the products first hand.

In Canada, Apple Store appointments are currently available in three locations in Toronto and one Apple Store in Laval. For more information, or to book an appointment, visit www.apple.com/ca.

By Jennifer Kavur



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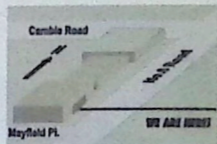
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Why you need one, and why you might not...yet

Every self-respecting student or home-based worker needs a printer. But quite likely a copier too. And a scanner. And maybe a fax machine.

It wasn't so very long ago that such capabilities would set you back a couple grand. However, all-in-one multifunction printers (MFPs) do it all in one box, and they've come a long way in the last few years. Not only can some of today's dream machines handle all the above—at sub-\$500 price points in most cases—but many of them will also print photos directly from your camera, print on both sides of a page and perhaps even fix you a double chocolate latte if you're so inclined.

But do they do it quickly? Will consumables (ink or toner and associated materials) consume all the money you saved initially? Will they stand the test of time?

Truth is that if you have the bucks and the necessary space—two extremely critical considerations for a dorm or home office—separate components are still a solid option. Ask yourself the following: If a highly regarded mid-level standalone black and white home/office laser printer such as HP's LaserJet P2015d costs \$400, and a top-notch standalone colour laser like the Lexmark C532dn runs perhaps \$200 more, how can a laser-based MFP at that price point deliver the same level of performance? Answer: It can't. Chances are it won't be as fast. Its toner cartridges may cost more. And it'll likely support less sophisticated printing functions.

Back in my day...

But the most important difference may be something you don't even notice at first—reliability. Sure, the warranties may be equal, but things become much more interesting five or 10 years down the road. I write this gazing lovingly at my HP LaserJet 4, circa 1995. It's been in for repair just once in a dozen years, and even then the problem lay with the owner, not the printer. Virtually all the moving parts are within the toner cartridge itself, and that cartridge is comparatively inexpensive. I've been tempted over the years to "upgrade" to a substantially more complex MFP and send both my printer and Panasonic phone/fax machine to the donation bin, but the old LaserJet 4, serial port connection and all, simply continues to be a faultless workhorse.

Something else to consider—if and when my standalone printer does break, I'll retain use of my standalone copier and scanner. Yet when an MFP goes on the fritz, all those other functions are lost too until the unit comes home from the repair shop.

Still, most home- or dorm-based users simply don't put intense demands and strains on their gear. Moreover, most of us need all the extra space an MFP can gain us, if just for the dishes and pop cans and televisions and all the other things that make a home office so...homey. For these reasons, and because MFPs are far less finicky now than they were even a few years back, they may be just the ticket for many.

As is the case with standalone printers, the prices of MFPs have more to do



Canon PIXMA MF830

with the method of image transfer than anything else. The most affordable machines are typically based on inkjet technology. Inkjet advantages include near-universal colour capability and generally strong photo reproduction. For a few dollars more, you move into laser technology. Laser generally delivers much faster output and crisper images than inkjet, its toner cartridges usually cost less per page than inkjet cartridges and the machines themselves are less prone to breakdowns. However, the cost of laser jumps substantially if you want colour. And even though laser toner cartridges last a lot longer, replacing them will set you back \$400 or more for the four colours.

The inkjet MFP battle

In the inkjet category, there seems to be no escaping the domination of Canon Canada. Currently consisting of no less than eight models, its wide-

ranging PIXMA roster of MFPs stretches all the way from the \$100 PIXMA MP160 to the \$500 PIXMA MP960. But the best part is that virtually every model has been extremely well received by both the press and end users.

The everything-but-the-proverbial-kitchen-sink \$400 PIXMA MP830 seems to hit the sweet spot just right, particularly if you also want high-grade photo printing. Features include a memory card reader, a big 2.5-inch LCD, a PictBridge connector so you can print directly from a PictBridge-enabled digicam, an integrated fax modem for standalone fax functionality, double-sided printing and scanning capabilities and 9600 dpi photo printing. It'll theoretically print and copy black and white pages at the snappy rate of 30 pages per minute, and colour at 24 PPM. It isn't networkable, but that shouldn't matter much to the SOHO community.

At just \$120, the ultra-affordable PIXMA MP180 has substantially more features than the bare bones \$100 PIXMA MP160, and is therefore a good



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bet for the budget conscious shopper, student or light user who needs to copy, scan and print. Like the far pricier MP830, it has a PictBridge connector and a media card reader for PC-less printing. It can't be networked, it can't be used as a fax machine and its page per minute speed is far from the high-end inkjet MFPs, yet the price is right.

Canon's PIXMA series leads the way, but don't write off HP's highly regarded Photosmart All-in-One series. Like PIXMA, the Photosmart lineup is all over the map, with a model in virtually every price range. Arguably the best of the HP bunch and priced right in between the two Canons discussed above is the Photosmart C6180 All-in-One Inkjet Printer. Indeed, it mimics most of the capabilities of the proficient PIXMA MP830, at about \$100 less.

The unit offers blazingly fast 32 ppm monochrome printing and 31 ppm

colour (under ideal conditions, of course), integrated wireless networking, a memory card reader, PictBridge support and a built-in fax. And its clever six-ink colour system allows you to replace only the colour(s) of ink you've used.

Lexmark Canada introduced a slew of inkjet MFPs at a variety of price points this year, with new slick styling and built-in Wi-Fi wireless networking on many models. In fact, Lexmark wants affordable wireless printing to be its big differentiator in this crowded market. Its X9350 (\$300) is a four-function (print, copy, scan, fax) unit that offers up to 32 ppm (black) and 27 ppm (colour) print speeds, and along with built-in Wi-Fi and built-in duplexing. Like its competitors, it also supports PictBridge and comes with a multi-format memory card reader. For a bit more than half that price (\$160),

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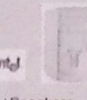
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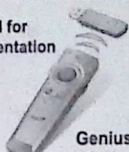
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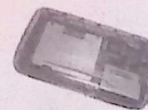


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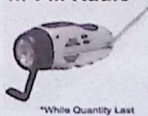
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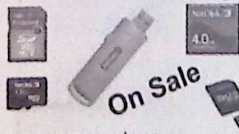
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you can get the Lexmark X4550, no faxing, not auto duplexing and slower printing speeds, but also with Wi-Fi.

Epson Canada's multifunction line is smaller than other manufacturers, with just four models ranging from \$120 to \$170. Epson printers have been long-time favourites with the digital photography crowd, largely due to Epson's pioneering work with pigment-based inkjet inks, which are more durable and fade resistant than dye-based inks. Epson tries to capitalize on its photo printing strengths in its all-in-ones, which it calls More-in-Ones by offering PC-less printing (with built-in colour LCDs to preview images), borderless 4x6 printing and other specialized features on some models like a straight-through media path and CD carrier that allows you to print labels, graphics etc. directly onto CDs.

In the past, Brother Canada has been known for lines of tough workhorse fax machines, which found a home in both small and medium sized businesses. Today, its multi-function line seems to have more of a small business appliance flavour than an inkjet printer flavour. For example, some models sport a telephone handset, like the traditional fax machine. However, it also has the features that home users come to expect such as a built-in colour LCD screen, PictBridge support and a built-in memory card reader. Moreover, Brother's line is even more extensive than Canon's, with 13 models ranging from \$80 to \$270. The top-end MFC-655CW pushes the meaning of all-in-one by adding an answering machine to the usual feature set of print, copy, scan and fax. It supports both standalone fax and PC faxing. This one also comes with built-in Wi-Fi networking.

As you can see, if you want an inkjet-based all-in-one, there are many models to consider. Something to think about: If you've decided to go the inkjet route, ask your retailer or check the Internet for a cost per page figure for the printers on your short list. If none exist, determine the prices and projected longevity of the ink cartridges yourself. It's more or less accepted that some inkjets—and even some lasers—will rob you blind after you've bought them, and that's a situation nobody wants to be in.

Epson AcuLaser CX11NF



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


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
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Laser MFPs: To colour or not to colour, that is the question

When you talk laser MFP, the current buzzword is colour. But that doesn't mean a black and white laser doesn't have its place. In fact, considering lasers are generally more dependable than inkjets, and that black and white lasers are generally more reliable and far less costly than colour models, monochrome MFPs deliver huge bang for the buck for those who don't print photos or colour brochures/homework.

On the decidedly thrifty side of things is the monochrome Samsung SCX-4200. Priced at little more than the cost of dinner and a movie for two

(\$150), it's hard to believe it's a laser. But it is, and not a bad one at that. It can't handle faxes and it doesn't incorporate fancy stuff like card readers, but it does deliver clean 600x600 dpi laser output, scalable copying and scanning capabilities. On top of all that, it's tiny—with a footprint that's just a bit bigger than a standard sheet of paper.

Some of the best dollar-to-performance monochrome lasers are found in Canon's strictly black and white imageCLASS series. Of these, the imageCLASS MF4150, with oodles of upbeat online user reports, a sub-\$300 price point and a small footprint, may be the best fit for the home office

denizen. The unit prints, scans, faxes and copies; features a 35-sheet automatic document feeder and a 250-sheet front-loading cassette; and sports automatic double-sided operation. For another \$100, the Brother MFC-7820N offers all of the above plus the added bonus of ultra-high 2400x600 dpi printing resolution, PC fax functions and a built-in internal network.

At the top of the multifunction totem pole is the full colour laser. Here, we have pricey beasts such as Lexmark's x500n (\$550) and x502n (\$750), both of which feature great looking prints, a massive 128MB of internal memory and smoking fast speeds. The difference between the two? The x502n offers fax capabilities, while the x500n does not.

Big buck machines and future shock

You'll find other equally respected models too, such as Brother's Multi-Function Center MFC-9420CN, Epson's AcuLaser CX11NF, Samsung's Colour Laser MFP CLX-3160FN and Dell's Multifunction Color Laser Printer 3115cn. Yet only the latter checks in under the \$600 mark, and all are physically imposing units apparently designed for office workgroup environments rather than the home office or dorm. Despite traditionally superior reliability and lower usage costs (Dell claims just one and a half pennies per page for the 3115n), it seems most colour laser all-in-ones aren't quite as ready for stay-at-home situations as their inkjet brethren.

What does the future hold? Down under in Australia, a company by the name of Silverbrook Research has quietly been slaving away on a technology deemed "Memjet." The big claim to fame is output speed—according to Silverbrook, Memjet can realistically print at an astounding 60 PPM. What's more, the technology will apparently offer a price-to-performance ratio better than today's monochrome lasers and photo print quality rivalling that of today's finest photo-centric inkjets. Needless to say, the big players in the industry are listening. For more info, head to www.memjet.com and check out the video of Memjet at work—it's quite incredible.

By Gord Goble

Dell 3115



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Digital stereo recording in your pocket

Olympus WS-331M

Voice recorders made the transition from analogue tape to solid state digital in the latter 1990s. While those early tapeless models were considered groundbreaking, the recently introduced Olympus WS-331M is an example of just how far this product category has evolved.

Of course, the world that the WS-331M enters is quite a different place as well. We users are more savvy about digital gadgets, but also more demanding of our digital devices. Moreover, digital audio isn't just about consuming music any more. The global phenomenon of podcasting has turned many into audio producers who want to sound as good as professional radio broadcasters.

The WS-331M does a fine job of recording voice notes to yourself, or making a record of a lecture or business meeting. It's set up with five folders and you can organize your recordings within them if you want. But if business

or classroom note taking is all you want a voice recorder for, you'd be equally well served by a less expensive model. At \$300, this flagship in Olympus' line isn't cheap, but here are some of the things beyond simple voice note taking you get for your coin.

It's a USB flash drive

The body is made in two parts, and when you separate the lower "L" shaped module holding the single AAA battery, you expose a standard USB connector on the upper module. Plug it into a PC and it's immediately recognized as a flash drive - and a biggie with two gigabytes of capacity. Recording at the lowest quality mono setting, that much capacity is good for around 550 hours of voice notes and musings, or more than 35 hours of high-quality stereo recording.

It records in stereo

Olympus says that recording group business meetings in stereo has some advantages in making it easier to distinguish individual speakers, thus helping the listener follow the flow of discussion, while also giving the whole group session a more natural sound. The unit comes with a built-in stereo microphone, but also has a 3.5 mm stereo mic jack so you can use a better mic if you need improved sound quality.

The WS-331M records in Windows Media Audio format, which offers a more efficient compression method than MP3 (e.g., equal sound quality with smaller file size or better sound quality with equal file size). Another big advantage in using this audio format is that no specialized software is needed to read the file. Thanks to Windows' market penetration, most audio programs understand WMA including the Windows Media Player that comes free with Windows. In fact, the Olympus device does not come with any audio software, although you can download a free DSS Light Player if you are so inclined.

When you connect the recorder to your PC via USB, it shows up as just another USB device, so you can drag and drop the recorded files to your PC hard drive for editing or further processing. And this is yet another benefit. If you'd used an audio cassette recorder, you'd have to play back the file in real time and rerecord it by capturing the signal using your sound card's line-in jack. Dragging and dropping a few hundred megabytes worth of audio files is nowhere near as arduous.

The Olympus unit offers three levels of stereo recording, all using a 44.1 kHz sampling rate. SP is the standard mode, and has a frequency range of 50 Hz-9 kHz, which is good for voice-only recording. The unit will record 142 hours in SP mode. In HQ mode, you get 71 hours of recording time and a frequency range of 50 Hz to 15 kHz (cassette tape recorder territory), while at the highest XQ mode, you can get 35 hours with a frequency range of 50 Hz-19 kHz. You also can use one of three mono recording modes.

It's a music player

While the WS-331M won't record in MP3 format, it will play music in either MP3 or WMA format. A small sliding switch on



the side of the unit lets you select voice record mode or music playback mode. Included with the player is a feature called WOW XT, which is made up of a spatial enhancer [pseudo surround] and a bass enhancer. There are also controls that allow you to select how you want a selection played (e.g., random, repeat) and a built-in equalizer. Playback frequency range is 20 Hz-20 kHz, which is the full range of sound humans can hear. Music on it sounds very good - this one easily competes with other dedicated MP3 players I've used.

The Olympus user manual gives a somewhat convoluted method of loading the unit with music using Windows Music Player, but I found it simpler to just

drag a folder of tunes into the Music folder in the voice recorder.

Overall, this is a desirable if somewhat expensive unit. It can be used as a music player, a high-quality stereo recorder or a mono note taker - or a USB flash drive. It runs on a single AAA battery and is about the same size and proportions as an iPod Nano [the W5-331M is 95 x 38 x 11 mm and 47 grams, compared to the Nano at 90 x 40 x 6.5 mm and 40 grams].

By David Tanaka

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Accessorize your laptop – in style

Add some clever extras to extend your PC's functionality, longevity

Some good news for those travelling with aging PCs: rather than laying out the cash for a whole new laptop, you can spice up your existing machine with a few good accessories.

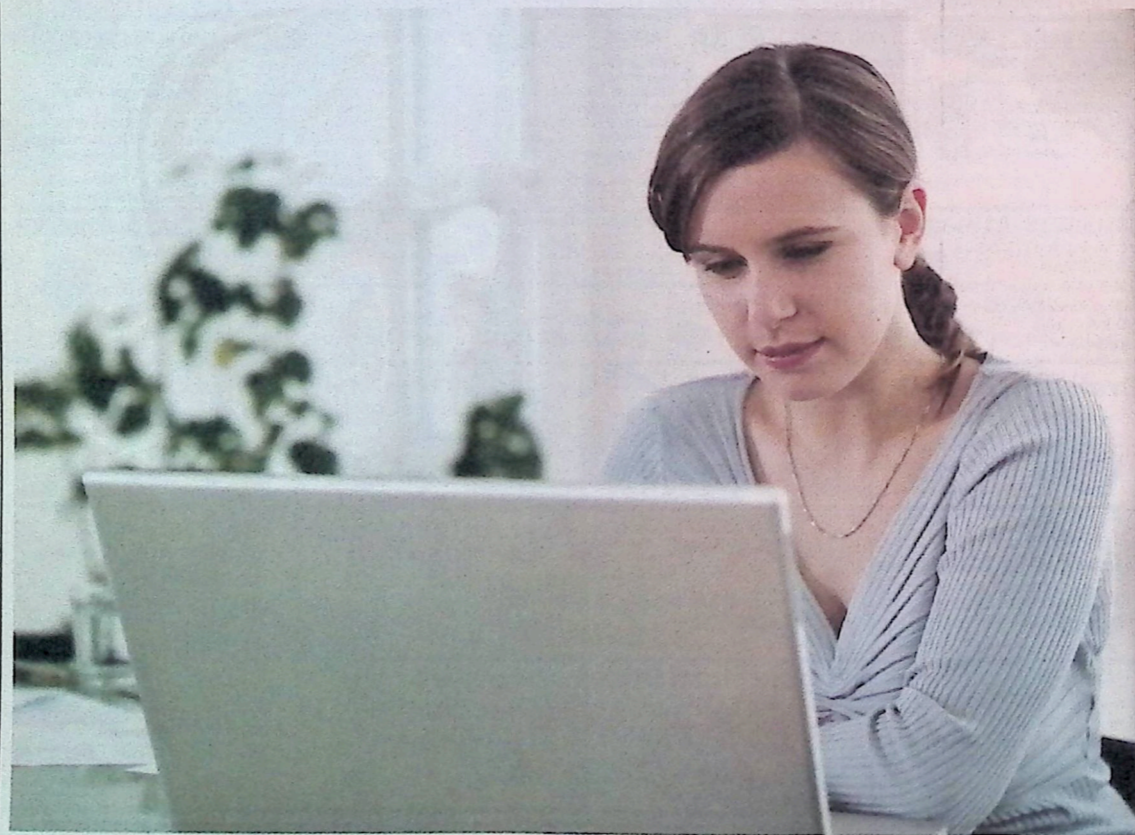
Computer add-ons – including webcams, ergonomic mice, snap-in modems, Bluetooth headsets and wireless printers – add some longevity and functionality to your laptop.

Following are a few recommendations.

Not mousing around

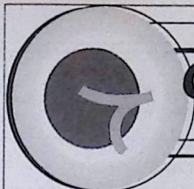
Perfect for laptop users, the Microsoft Wireless Notebook Laser Mouse 6000 (\$49.99; www.microsoft.ca) is a small, but comfortable optical mouse that features a thumb-sized receiver that, when plugged into an available Universal Serial Bus (USB) port on the computer, enables wireless control. This feature isn't necessarily unique, but its clever power-saving function is – simply snap the USB receiver underneath the mouse to turn off its battery (included). This design should also reduce the odds of losing the receiver. Other features of this wireless notebook mouse include Windows and Mac port, rubber-lined sides for a better grip and a body designed for both right- and left-handed users.

Microsoft Wireless Notebook
Laser Mouse 6000





hubcanada.com

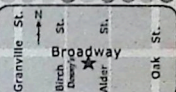


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Lexmark Z1420



Smile, you're online

Why type an email or instant message when you can be seeing and talking to your friends in cyberspace? The Microsoft LifeCam NX-6000 (\$89.99; www.microsoft.ca) is a top-of-the-line consumer Webcam (Web camera), designed specifically for laptops or flat-panel LCD screens. Offering high-definition 2.0 megapixel video (1600 x 1190 pixels) and 7.8 megapixel photos (3200 x 2380 pixels), this tiny Webcam – a little bigger than a lipstick – features a built-in, high-quality microphone; pan, zoom and tilt capabilities; and a one-touch call button integrated with the free Windows Live Messenger service. The LifeCam NX-6000 requires a Windows XP or Vista machine.

Microsoft LifeCam NX-6000



Stay connected

Wi-Fi is great, but what if you can't find a wireless hotspot in a café, airport lounge or hotel? The good news is you can log online via your laptop anywhere you can get a cell phone signal – even in the back of a cab or a park bench. And so it's no surprise wireless modems are growing in popularity – especially among mobile executives. Sierra Wireless (www.sierrawireless.com) offers wireless modems as either PC Cards or USB dongles. Either snaps into the laptop and grants you access to your cell carrier. Prices start at \$49.99 after rebate and three-year commitment with Rogers Wireless (Sierra Wireless AirCard 860); Telus Mobility plans start at \$99.99 on a 3-year contract (for either the Sierra Wireless Air Card 595 or the 595U USB).

By Marc Saltzman

Sierra Wireless AirCard 860



Olympus E-510 hands-on

Last fall at the Photokina photo trade show in Germany, Olympus fans were titillated by news of the company's new 10 megapixel SLR. For North Americans, the joy was short-lived when they discovered that the model would be available only in Europe. Happily, a few months later, Olympus announced not one, but two, 10 megapixel SLRs – the E-Volt E-410 and E-Volt E-510 – and these are most definitely available here.

Currently, the E-410 sells for \$799.95 and the E-510 is \$100 more. The two have nearly the same specs, but for the extra \$100, the E-510 offers mechanical, sensor-based image stabilization and the option to bracket white balance settings. It is also slightly larger and heavier [136 x 91.5 x 68 mm (w x h x d) and 460 grams for the E-510 vs. 129.5 x 91 x 53 mm and 375 g for the E-410]. In my opinion, the E-510's mechanical image stabilization alone is easily worth the extra bucks.

I enjoyed my month with the E-510 and 14-42 mm Olympus Zuiko lens. When you consider that the camera plus zoom lens package costs just \$100 more than the body by itself, the package is quite a bargain. I found the zoom ring on this budget lens a little stiff for my liking, and the bayonet mount is

made of plastic, not metal as you would expect on a more expensive lens. However, the optical performance is solid and the zoom range is very useful, going from the equivalent (in 35 mm terms) of 28 mm wide angle to 84 mm medium telephoto.

The E-510 is a camera equally well suited for a first-time SLR user or someone that wants a greater degree of control over camera functions. Like many cameras in this price range, the E-510 has a full complement of scene-oriented automatic settings, as well as the more traditional programmed, aperture priority, shutter priority and manual modes. These scene modes, if you are not familiar with them, are pre-programmed to provide the best combination of shutter speed, aperture and ISO sensitivity for specific shooting situations. Photographing something on a white sand beach or snowy ski slope requires a different setting than photographing something at dusk or in the evening, for example, and scene modes are a designed to save you from the bother of having to figure out what works best for those specific conditions. The 510 has two ways to set a scene mode. On the mode dial are five icons for the most common situations. You can further

customize these by over-riding some of the settings. There is also a setting labeled Scene on the mode dial, and selecting this opens a menu on the LCD view screen where you can select one of 14 scene modes (most of these are fixed with no option to over-ride any of the settings).

The 510's image stabilization system has two modes (plus it can be turned off altogether). The normally operating IS1 mode is joined by IS2, which sets vertical stabilization only. Olympus explains that this allows you to pan a fast moving object like a race car and achieve a blurred background effect, while still enjoying the benefit of some image stabilization to help keep the main subject in sharp focus.

There are features in the E-510 that will make more advanced users happy too. You can save image files in raw data format (raw format is increasingly popular with advanced photographers because of the



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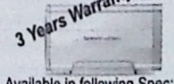
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post-processing flexibility it offers) as well as raw+jpeg or jpeg only. Olympus also allows you to save image files using AdobeRGB, which is a bigger colour space than sRGB. This offers some potential benefits if you make your own prints using a photo inkjet printer, as six- and eight-colour inkjet printers are more capable of printing the broader spectrum of colours that can be expressed with AdobeRGB.

The camera also has quite a sophisticated white balance control. Along with the usual presets for cloudy, sunny, incandescent and fluorescent light settings, there is one manual setting plus a custom option that allows you to dial in Kelvin colour temperature settings ranging from 2000-14,000 degrees. And of course, there is an auto white balance setting, which works well for the most part.

The E-510 has variable ISO settings too, ranging from ISO100-ISO1600, plus an auto setting. I found that even at ISO 1600 the images were quite clean, although a lot depends on the subject. Colour noise was definitely evident on dark surfaces or shadowed areas, but my high ISO samples were otherwise very acceptable. And image quality overall is very pleasing.

Every camera has its own personality, and that's the case with the E-510. If you are used to using a Nikon or Canon camera, for example, you may have to acquaint yourself with the Olympus way of organizing onscreen menus and placing dials and other controls on the camera body. At the same time, it is by no means a difficult camera to figure out. The camera has a number of one-touch buttons to access functions like image stabilization, white balance, ISO, etc., so you can quickly make adjustments to the most common variables. The E-510 also has an extensive set of adjustments that are organized in tabbed menus, and you can quickly adjust these too – although I did have to consult the manual a couple of times.

However, setting up the camera to the ISO, quality and white balance settings I like was pretty simple business, and once set, the camera worked pretty much as I expected it should. I found that exposure was very accurate, and even with bright daylight scenes with lots of contrast, the camera was able to produce well exposed images with no highlight blowouts and with lots of shadow detail. I found the greens in grass and trees a bit vibrant, but skin tones were very pleasing although somewhat pale. A bit of white balance tweaking would remedy this.

Compared to my five-year-old behemoth SLR weighing in at 760 grams, the E-510 is significantly lighter (300 g lighter, to be precise) as well as considerably smaller. Nevertheless, the Olympic is very comfortable to use, and I certainly did not miss the extra bulk or weight.

Olympus, along with Panasonic and Leica, have taken a different path to the digital SLR. These manufacturers have adopted the Four-Thirds design spec, which give the cameras some unique properties. The image circle of the sensor is half that of a 35 mm film frame, and thus the focal length equivalent is a factor of two. In other words, a 25 mm lens on a Four-Thirds camera gives roughly the same picture angle as a 50 mm lens on a 35 mm film camera. Thus, the basic 14-42 mm zoom lens that ships with some Olympus packages offers a similar zoom range as a 28-84 mm zoom on a 35mm film camera, which is a very useful range. One benefit of the Four-Thirds specification is that cameras that follow it use a common lens mount, and thus, you can use a Leica or Panasonic lens with the Olympus body if you so choose.

The other digital SLR makers use a sensor that has the same proportions as a 35 mm film frame, which gives a 3:2 aspect ratio. The Four-Thirds system (and most point-and shoot cameras) give a slightly more square image proportion of 4:3.

While more cameras are now offering anti-dust systems for sensors, Olympus was the one to pioneer it. It's a system where, on startup, the sensor is given an ultra-high frequency shake, which dislodges any dust that may have fallen on the sensor. This same ability to shake the sensor figures in the E-510's image stabilization system too.

Another technology pioneered by Olympus is Live View, which is the ability to use the LCD screen to compose a shot, just as you can with point-and-shoot cameras. The basic design of a single lens reflex camera puts a mirror between the lens and the sensor, so it is impossible for the sensor to pick up image data until the mirror swings out of the way – which happens each time the shutter is fired. The E-510 and E-410 use a smaller secondary sensor which sends a real-time image to the 2.5-inch LCD screen.

By David Tanaka



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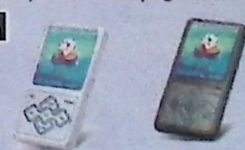
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Lost Planet: Extreme Condition

Publisher: Capcom Developer: Capcom

ESRB rating: Teen Score: 3/5

Platform: Windows PC (Running on a Windows Vista box with a 3.0 GHz Intel Dual Core processor, 2GB of RAM and a 512MB ATI Radeon X1900 XT graphics card, displayed at 1280x1024 on a Dell 2407FPW 24-inch LCD.)

I never thought I'd have cause to quote *Starship Troopers*, but as I played through Capcom's new insect exterminating shooter I couldn't help but think of the movie's legendary line, "The only good bug is a dead bug."

Indeed, the creepy crawlies we go up against in *Lost Planet* share much in common with those in Paul Verhoeven's sci-fi classic. For starters, they don't big humanity much. In fact, they've already pretty much wiped planet EON III clean of our species, save a few remaining snow pirates. And they come in

all shapes and sizes, from the small and relatively ineffectual air variety to towering, pointy-toothed wormlike monsters that burrow through the ground.

Our hero, a partial amnesiac named Wayne who subsists on a rare the energy source called T-Eng, usually has to wade into these innumerable intimidating insectoids all by his lonesome. But don't worry, Wayne definitely hold his own. He pilots agile mechs, which can be found abandoned all around the planet, that have some serious bug killing firepower in the form of arm-mounted rockets, chain guns, and rifles. When he's on foot, he wields incredibly heavy and potent guns (some of which are actually meant for mechs) that are often as long as he is tall.

Thanks to the destruction caused by these implements of insect dea



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Lost Planet's massive bug battles make for some truly spectacular sights. Indeed, regardless of whether you're a fan of science fiction themed shooters, it's hard not to be captivated by the game's gorgeous graphics—particularly the snow. The white dunes through which Wayne slogs represent the most beautiful and authentic frozen flakes of water ever seen in a game; sunlight glints off the icy crusts of snowy ridges in remarkably believable fashion, thigh-deep tracks are created as our protagonist traipses through deep drifts, and snowstorms appear so thoroughly genuine (and enveloping) they never fail to send a chill down my spine.

[It's also worth noting that Lost Planet is one of the first titles to take advantage of complex visual effects made possible by DirectX 10, the much-hyped upgrade to Microsoft's tried and true PC gaming platform that comes with Vista. Alas, I can't comment on the sort of visual enhancements DX10-equipped users might be privy to—I didn't have access to a graphics card that supported the new platform at press time.]



Originally an Xbox 360 title, Lost Planet plays well using either a keyboard and mouse or a console-style gamepad. Capcom has altered the control scheme in the port, locking the targeting reticule in the centre of the screen rather than allowing it to wander slightly with subtle shifts in aim, as it did in the default version of the Xbox 360's controls. It was a smart move—while the original targeting mechanic was unique and worked well on a console, I imagine it would feel a little loosey-goosy to most PC players.

The greatest disparity between the two versions—and, as it turns out, the PC edition's greatest weakness—is online multiplayer. Capcom went to great lengths to deliver a compelling online experience for the Xbox 360 game, offering excellent support, terrific stability, and plenty of free bonus maps. Sadly, the PC edition ships with only a handful of maps. Not that it matters much, since at the time of this writing online play appeared to be, for lack of a better term, broken. I was unable to join a single game, and, according to several posts on Capcom's official Lost Planet forums, I'm not the only one. I just couldn't find any sessions to join. If Capcom releases a patch to fix

the problem (whatever it may be), it's possible that PC multiplayer could become as big a draw as it has been for the Xbox 360, but that's a pretty big uncertainty on which to hinge a purchasing decision.

However, assuming online play isn't a make or break factor in one's buying criteria, the campaign is engaging and lengthy enough to make Lost Planet well worth checking out. Personally, I just can't get enough bug squishing. In fact, I think I might pull on some combat boots and head out to the park this weekend to look for a few insects to stomp on. After all, as the faux military ads in Starship Troopers tell us, we all have to do our part in the war on bugs, even if we don't have access to massive, ridiculously powerful sci-fi guns.

By Chad Sapieha

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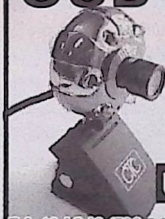


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DV or Not DV

Start Your Own School of Videography

Good timing, Barb! Just as I was preparing this column, a reader question about a previous article in HUB:DL came in, asking about tips for getting training and education on camera operation and video production techniques.

Of course, there are many formalized full-time programs in media production, with heavy emphasis on digital video, at both public and private schools across the country. These are usually serious programs for serious students - some are two, three or more years in length - and they can be very expensive.

If you want some DV training options that you can pursue at your own pace, in the comfort of your own home, a more "do-it-yourself" approach can be very rewarding, especially when supplemented with some of the great training DVDs out there.

One of the best - and the one that generated that inquiry - is Camera Command. It's insightful, informative and it's a riot to watch! With the right touch of humour, self-deprecation and creative deconstruction, this training DVD can indeed be viewed again and again.

The disc's contents are organized into a total of 42 chapters, grouped in five sessions, looking at various aspects of a video camera's operation, functions and features. There is also bonus material with some behind-the-scenes footage and outtakes. A special Education Version is also available, complete with additional print reference material and suggested work assignments. Either way, you can easily structure your own training by balancing the DVD instruction with your own hands-on, trial-and-error assignments based on the disc's material.

The DVD is highly focused (pun intentional) on camera operations, and as such it talks about concepts like camera controls, shot composition, location and studio lighting, video formats and so on. More information is available online at www.cameracommand.com.

While you are online, check out any number of interactive web-based video training courses, some available for free, some by subscription, some for a fixed fee. It might be pretty cool to say, "I learned video from the BBC" (check out the Beeb's Intro to Video Production course at www.bbctraining.com).

A more local option for teaching yourself through hands-on exposure and experience are the many artist-run co-ops and independent media arts centres, located in most cities across Canada. Through a combination of reduced rental rates and instructor facilitated workshops, you can get your hands on the latest equipment - and your head wrapped around the latest techniques for digital media acquisition, production and distribution.

Vancouver's Video In, for example, is a not-for-profit video production, exhibition and distribution centre that offers basic and advanced training in video production, editing, sound design and multimedia techniques. Workshops are hands-on, project-oriented and members of the centre have full access to its equipment and edit facilities once the training is completed. You don't have to worry about being trained on a camera you will never use or see again; Video In works with two of the more familiar and popular digital camera packages, including the Sony PD-150 and Sony TRV-900.

Video Pool, located in Winnipeg, is dedicated to independent video, audio and computer integrated multimedia production. It also provides a range of training programs, including an intro to digital camera class that covers camera operation, technique and composition, lighting, sound recording and more, using either the student's own camera or one of Video Pool's HDV cameras.

Calgary's EMMEDIA is accessible by the broader community, including independent producers, practising artists, as well as members and non-members alike. Video equipment, training workshops and screenings are scheduled.

In Toronto, two well-known and long-established centres, Trinity Square Video and Charles Street Video, offer training programs on a wide variety of topics, to members or non-members.

In the interests of full disclosure, I will mention that I am one of the instructors at Trinity, leading an introductory video camera course and a basic lighting and sound production class for video. Full day workshops offer students a chance for hands-on learning with available DV camcorders like the Canon GL1 or Panasonic 200, as well as various lighting kits and audio gear for indoor or outdoor recording.

Actually, Trinity takes a three-pronged approach to video - the introductory course addresses both practical and theoretical concepts and practices. Analog versus digital processing, tape versus hard drive or flash media recording, styles of shooting and composition, and shooting for the edit are discussed and demonstrated. There's a hands-on camera workshop, more tilted towards actual operation and manipulation of various cameras and settings, and there's a two-day Video 101 workshop, in which camera operation and editing are taught by means of an actual start-to-finish project.

Ottawa's Saw Video offers both one-day and two-day DV workshops (as well as individual workshops in lighting, sound and special effects). On the first day of the workshop, participants receive basic instruction on popular three-chip cameras - the Canon XL1, Panasonic AG-DVX100 and the Sony PD-150. Three point lighting is covered, as is location power requirements and strategies. A variety of mics are used and their applications discussed.

Day Two of the workshop includes shooting exercises conducted both indoors and outdoors (weather permitting), simulating varying conditions and situations. The second day of the workshop focuses on the Sony PD-150.

Ed Video Media Arts (in Guelph, ON) and the Hamilton Media Arts centre are among many other such artist-driven resource centres in Canada dedicated to independent film, video and time-based multimedia arts. These facilities, as HMA describes it, provide the community with access to facilities, equipment, peer resources and educational initiatives.

There are more than 40 such video centres and media co-operatives across the country, and together with other video associations, camera clubs, media organizations and technical centres, they provide the infrastructure that you can use to build your own training program.

They can create a balance point between important hands-on practical experience and the technical and aesthetic theory that underpins media production, so that you can be your own student and your own teacher, on your own timetable.

By Lee Rickwood

Lee Rickwood is a freelance writer and independent video producer. He operates Word On A Wire, an independent company providing editorial, media production and consulting services to individuals and companies across North America. He can be reached at videodaze@goodmedia.com.



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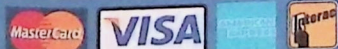
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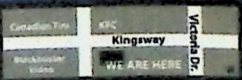


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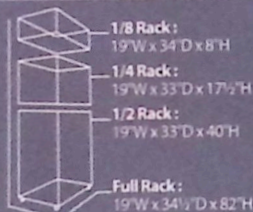
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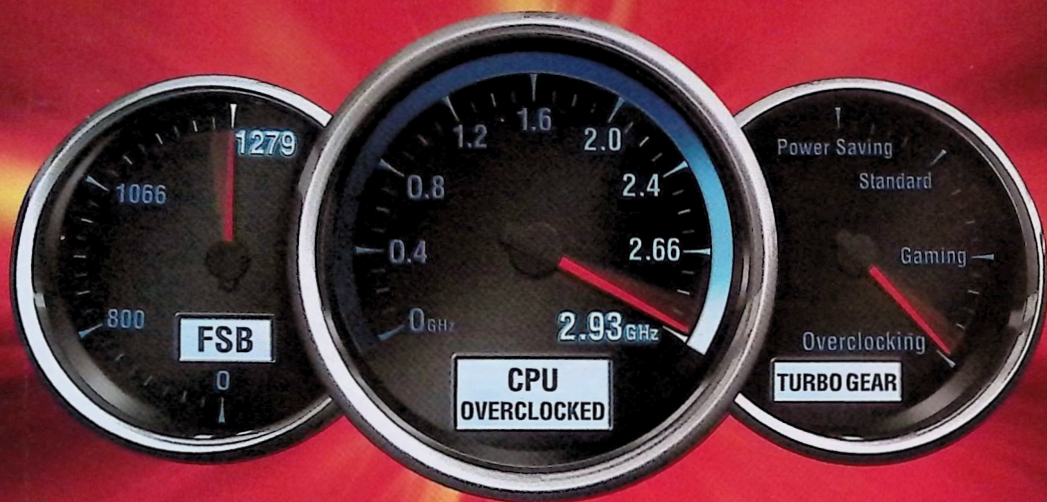
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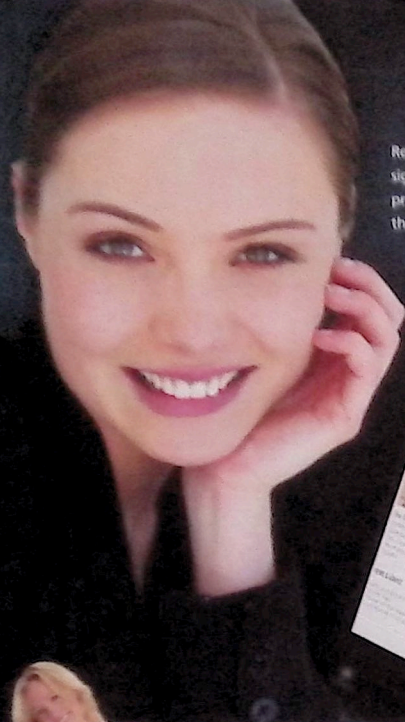
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